

EXHIBIT 1
to the Declaration of Jay W Brown

**The
Intercept**

ERIK PRINCE OFFERED LETHAL SERVICES TO SANCTIONED RUSSIAN MERCENARY FIRM WAGNER

A business relationship between Prince and Wagner would, in effect, make the prominent Trump administration adviser a subcontractor to the Russian military.

Matthew Cole, Alex Emmons

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Photo illustration: Soohie Cho/The Intercept, Getty Images

Erik Prince, founder of the private security firm Blackwater and a Trump administration adviser, has sought in recent months to provide military services to a sanctioned Russian mercenary firm in at least two African conflicts, according to three people with knowledge of the efforts.

Prince, who is the brother of Trump Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, met earlier this year with a top official of Russia's Wagner Group and offered his mercenary forces to support the firm's operations in Libya and Mozambique, according to two people familiar with Prince's offer.

Wagner officials said they are not interested in working with Prince, three people familiar with their decision told The Intercept.

A lawyer for Prince denied that his client met anyone from Wagner.

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The Wagner Group is a semi-private military force that operates in countries or conflicts where the Russian government seeks plausible deniability for its activities. It is often equipped and supported directly by the Russian Ministry of Defense, [according to reports](#) and experts who track Wagner's activities. The U.S. State Department [web-site](#) also lists Wagner as an entity connected to the "Defense Sector of the Government of the Russian Federation." Any business relationship between Prince and Wagner would, in effect, make the influential Trump administration adviser a subcontractor to the Russian military.

In recent years, the Russian government has deployed Wagner to sev-

eral African countries, Ukraine, and Syria, where [the U.S. military killed dozens of Wagner fighters in 2018](#) after the Russians and their Syrian allies attacked an oil facility that the United States was defending.

“Wagner Group is an instrument of Russian policy. It works under the GRU, which is the Russian military intelligence,” said Sean McFate, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a former military contractor who has written about mercenaries.

In attempting to do business with Wagner, Prince may have exposed himself to legal liability.

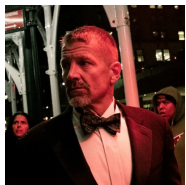
In attempting to do business with Wagner, Prince may also have exposed himself to legal liability. In 2017, the Trump administration [sanctioned Wagner](#), as well as its founder and head Dmitry Utkin, for having “recruited and sent soldiers to fight alongside [Russian-backed] separatists in eastern Ukraine” during the 2014 Russian invasion. The

Russian government denied involvement in the invasion, even as its forces occupied and took control of Crimea, also in Ukrainian territory, in violation of international law.

The sanctions prohibit individuals or companies from providing “financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, any person whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to this order.” They also forbid anyone “to have acted or purported to act for or on behalf” of Wagner. The 2017 addition of Wagner to the sanctions list builds on a [2014 executive order](#)

signed by President Barack Obama.

“In my experience, the act of soliciting from a sanctioned party would indeed be an apparent violation,” said Brian O’Toole, a senior fellow with the Atlantic Council and former senior sanctions official at the Treasury Department. “Whether you make that [legal] case is an entirely separate matter,” he said, adding that pitching business to Wagner “would seem to be a fairly egregious thing to do.”



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When Prince met with Wagner leadership, he was already under [federal investigation](#) for violating arms trafficking regu-

lations. The proposal to the Russian firm also raises questions about whether Trump administration officials authorized the meeting or were aware of Prince’s efforts to work with the group.

A former Navy SEAL who rose to prominence and notoriety as head of the private security firm Blackwater, Prince has been a vocal supporter of President Donald Trump, serving as an unofficial adviser on military and foreign policy issues in Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. Prince was a Trump donor in 2016 and has worked to support the president politically while proposing private military solutions that would benefit his companies financially.

Early in the Trump administration, Prince proposed privatizing the war in Afghanistan and supplying Trump with a [private spy service](#) intended to circumvent the U.S. intelligence community. Neither proposal succeeded, despite having support for some of his ideas from senior administration officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

For years, Prince has tried, mostly unsuccessfully, to win military contracts with governments in Africa and the Middle East. Wagner has become an increasingly visible player in the region as Russia's influence there has grown, allowing the country to operate under the radar at a time when "plausible deniability is more powerful than firepower," according to McFate, the mercenary expert.

"The reason why groups like Wagner exist, and the reason why people like Erik Prince [are] succeeding, is that modern war is getting sneakier and mercenaries and groups like Wagner are a great way to get things done in the shadows," McFate said.

Libya has been divided and in conflict since the U.S. and NATO allies removed longtime dictator

Moammar Gadhafi in 2011.

The United Nations and most of the international

community, including the U.S, recognize the Government of National Accord in the Libyan capital Tripoli as the country's official leaders.

But the eastern portion of the country is led by strongman Khalifa Hifter, who tried last year to take Tripoli. Both sides are backed by foreign powers that have continually violated a U.N. embargo on military support. Turkey and Qatar have supported the GNA, while Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt have backed Hifter.

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Last spring, Hifter's forces, the Libyan National Army, moved to take Tripoli, but were thwarted within days. Hifter turned to [Moscow](#) and [Wagner](#). Americans are prohibited from aiding either side of the conflict without U.S. government authorization.

At the same time, Prince sought to provide a force in Mozambique, where the government has been fighting a small insurgency over the past two years. President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique flew to Moscow to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in August 2019. The countries signed several trade pacts, and Russia agreed to send military aid. Russian military hardware and Russian nationals working for Wagner arrived in Mozambique in September, [according to news reports](#).

After Wagner lost more than a dozen fighters in Mozambique, Prince sent a proposal to the Russian firm offering to supply a ground force as well as aviation-based surveillance, according to documents viewed by The Intercept and a person familiar with Prince's proposal.

Prince has also served as an adviser to the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, known as MBZ, for more than a decade. Under bin Zayed's leadership, the UAE, a close regional ally of the U.S., has intervened militarily in several regional wars in the Middle East and Africa. A pariah during the Obama administration, Prince was taken in by the Emirati crown prince and awarded a contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars to create and train a presidential guard for the royal family. He was later removed for mismanagement, among other reasons.

Prince also has ties to China. He is co-chair of Frontier Services Group, a Hong-Kong based logistics company he founded and whose largest investor is the Chinese government. The Intercept has previously [reported](#) that the U.S. government has investigated Prince for his ties to

China's intelligence service. The conflicts between Prince's commercial interests and the goals of the many governments that retain his services have piled up as Prince has tried to sell military and mercenary capabilities around the world. FSG, for example, signed a contract for fishing rights in Mozambique around the same time Prince began exploring defense contracts there. The fishing contract has since been dissolved, according to the company.

"The conflicts of interest are deep and threaten democracy when you have a free agent going between the U.S. and its main power rivals," said McFate. "It would never clear an intelligence community background check. This is a dangerous thing for any democracy."

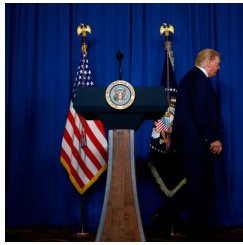
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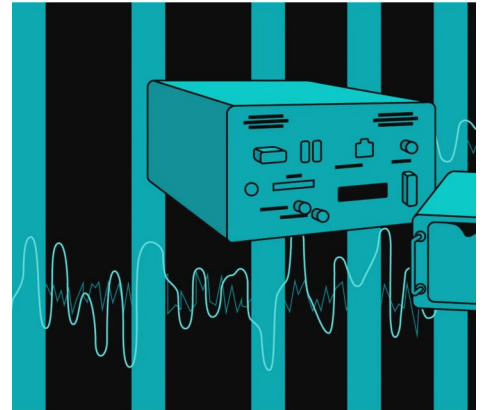
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